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Democrat backs aid to Contra guerrillas

By Jay Mallin Sr.
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Rep. Dante B. Fascell, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, says it is "vital" for the United States to continue support of the rebels fighting the Sandinista rulers of Nicaragua.

In a question-and-answer interview with The Washington Times, the Florida Democrat outlined a position markedly different from other leaders of the Democratic Party who have opposed such assistance. Democratic Presidential Candidate Walter Mondale has repeatedly called for a U.S. military pullout from Central America.

Meanwhile, another key Democrat, Rep. Clarence D. Long, D-Md., chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, agreed to back \$126 million in military aid for fiscal 1985, which starts Oct. 1. That is only about \$6 million less than President Reagan requested and equal to this year's aid to the Central American country.

His action was hailed by the Reagan administration. L. Craig Johnstone, deputy assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, said he was "pleased that there is a growing bipartisan consensus" over the 1985 spending.

Rep. Fascell has been a member of Congress for 30 years, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee since 1957, and this year he became chairman.

Asked whether he believed there was cause for concern in the ongoing Soviet military buildup, he responded:

"Absolutely. It demonstrates that the Soviets have not slowed down one bit in building their military capability to achieve their political objectives. We have to be concerned from the military and political standpoints."

Rep. Fascell said he did not believe, however, that communist Cuba poses a military threat to the United States; but, he added, "there is no question that the existence of

Cuba as a communist state backed by the Soviet Union is a political and a military problem for all the countries in the hemisphere."

"And when you add to that the constant export of ideology and support for organizations that are trying to undermine democratic institutions throughout the area, then you have a problem of considerable concern," he said.

Rep. Fascell indicated that the mining of Nicaraguan harbors by the rebels was a prime reason for the U.S. cutoff of assistance to the rebels.

He continued: "Otherwise there would be a bloodbath and, secondly, this would diminish U.S. credibility once we had made that commitment. That's the reason I supported them."

Rep. Fascell emphasized that he does not favor "U.S. military involvement in Central America," but he pointed out:

"I have supported sending advisers to El Salvador. I supported military assistance to El Salvador. I supported military assistance to Honduras. I supported the military advisers in Honduras. I supported assistance to the Contras."

The congressman warned that the United States must pay greater continuing attention to Latin American affairs. He asserted that unless there are effective remedies to the area's economic and social problems, the United States will be sitting "on a volcano that is going to blow up."

"There has been a tendency, I might say, not to focus sufficient national will on the problems in the Western Hemisphere. We hit it in stops starting as far back as Franklin Roosevelt and the Good Neighbor Policy, then Jack Kennedy with the Alliance for Progress, and now with the Caribbean Initiative," the congressman said.